

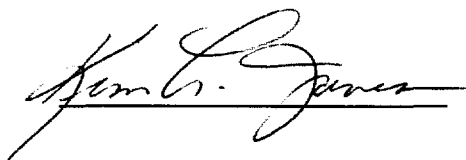
In-Class Tutoring: Where Writing Centers and Classrooms Meet

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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### Purpose of Thesis

This study assesses a new program called in-class tutoring that was recently implemented in Ball State's Writing Center. Initially, the thesis describes the program, explains the problem, identifies the methodology, lists the results, and suggests recommendations for strengthening the program. The study is focused on the academic year of 1992-93.

### Description of the Program

Writing centers have long been applauded for improving students' writing, but now writing centers are beginning to move in new directions beyond a laboratory setting; tutors have taken on many new and different roles through supplemental instruction and tutoring on-line (through computer networks). Recently Ball State University's Writing Center has implemented an innovative program which places Writing Center tutors in the classroom. Although the program has existed for two semesters, no system has yet been established to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. I contend that in-class tutoring is a more effective means of improving writing skills than isolated tutoring in the Writing Center, and it benefits all parties involved. As an Honors student and writing tutor, I will review the program, discuss the study completed, evaluate the program's impact, and recommend changes that could be adopted to insure the success of future in-class tutoring programs.

In-class tutoring, in its most simple form, allows tutors to enter writing classrooms and assist instructors in improving students' writing. Some instructors request that tutors attend every class session, while others ask that tutors come to class only on peer editing days. The recent implementation of the portfolio method in classrooms has given the tutors and the instructors more time to directly help students because they revise and rewrite in class instead of always beginning new papers. Tutors can work with students individually or in groups,

usually addressing the same problems students had previously brought to the Writing Center. Initially, questions about grammar are the most common; however, as the semester progresses, tutors become more familiar with the students' writing, and other issues such as development, organization, and style become the focus.

It was just this idea of delving deeper into the concept of writing which spawned the in-class tutoring program. During the spring of 1992, the Writing Center's director and assistant director wrote a proposal to the Writing Program Director and the Chairperson of the English Department (See Attachment 1). Since the proposed program could profoundly improve students' writing without increasing the number of hours in the budget, the proposal was accepted. Implementation was not very difficult, since the main goal was only to duplicate tutoring activities that previously existed in the Writing Center and present them in the classroom. The in-class tutoring program started the following semester.

At the beginning of the fall term in 1992, the new director, Cindy Johanek, provided sign-up forms for all instructors in the Writing Program office. Since a memo had circulated the previous spring, most instructors were aware of the program's existence. As instructors returned the forms to the Writing Center, they were paired with tutors based on mutually convenient schedules unless an instructor requested a specific tutor. Certain tutors were requested usually because that tutor had been a student in

one or more of the instructor's classes, and the tutor would be more familiar with teaching philosophy, assignments, and classroom expectations. Twenty-one of twenty-three sections were filled with in-class tutors in the first semester alone. The semester began with a short orientation period where tutors met with their matched instructors, and this helped both parties feel more comfortable about an unfamiliar situation. Though the meeting periods took place during the first few weeks of the semester the first semester, neither instructors, tutors, nor students seemed confident about the details or how the program would work. Because of this, a few guidelines were set up to ease all parties involved through the transition.

The Writing Center provided policies which sometimes extended beyond the guidelines of the instructors, and they further defined the tutors' roles in the classroom. These policies included but were not limited to the following:

- 1) In no way would peer tutors act as a substitute if an instructor could not attend a class session, and tutors would not in any way grade papers or take positions of authority in the classrooms, such as a teaching assistant would. This policy insured that the "peer" remained in the peer tutoring, and tutors would not be put in positions which they were not qualified to handle.

- 2) Another guideline was that tutors were to remain in allegiance with the Writing Center. If an instructor and a student were at odds, the tutors were never to side with one or

the other. When involved with in-class tutoring, tutors should do what they do best: talk about writing. This turned out to be more easily said than done, especially when both parties wanted to involve the tutor; however, tutors were encouraged to distance themselves from being a mediator in student-instructor conflicts.

### Problem

With growing attention to budget restraints in Ball State's English Department, the staff of the Writing Center found that justifying their existence was necessary. The main concern, then, was that the Writing Center had no accurate means of record keeping. Tutors and administrators alike believed that the Center served a good purpose, but no method of evaluation was developed for the new in-class tutoring program that would justify its permanence in the curriculum.

Cindy Johaneck, the Writing Center Director, asked me to complete a study that would assess the strengths and weaknesses through anonymous questionnaires distributed to both students and instructors. The responses clearly showed that in-class tutoring directly and positively affects students' writing. Accordingly, I concluded that a tutor's presence in the classroom can give students the tools and knowledge necessary to be competent and independent writers. I expected some endorsement from the parties involved in the program because students and instructors voiced their approval during the semester. The overwhelmingly positive response, however, was a pleasant surprise.

Implications of these contentions are: 1) in-class tutoring may survive and even thrive at Ball State, and 2) other universities may begin in-class tutoring programs through their English Departments.

### Method

#### *Subjects*

In order to more accurately assess the program's success or failure, two groups (instructors and students) received questionnaires that asked about in-class tutoring and provided space for additional comments; the third group, tutors, were asked questions that pertained to their duties, classroom dynamics, and tutor-instructor relations.

The first group comprised five hundred and thirty-nine students attending classes with tutors. The number of students questioned was forty-two percent of the total number of students who attended classes with in-class tutors. Statistical analysis is unavailable, and the cause will be discussed further in the section on materials used. It is reasonable to assert, though, because of my experience in six sections of in-class tutoring, that students were of a wide variety of ages, races, and backgrounds. A majority was probably female, and some international students participated in the program and completed the questionnaire.

The second group questioned were the instructors who supervised the in-class tutors. At the end of the fall 1992

semester, all instructors received a form which asked several questions about the tutors' performances and their duties. Eight of eleven instructors responded, which is approximately seventy-three percent. Other demographic information is again unavailable because of the questionnaire's lack of completeness.

In-class tutors were the third group to be questioned. These thirteen subjects never received formal questionnaires; however, six vocally responded to a uniform set of questions. All tutors were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four except the director who was twenty-eight. All tutors were traditional students who entered college immediately after high school (except the director), but not all tutors had been enrolled in the classes for which they were tutoring, nor had all tutors been students of their in-class instructors.

### *Materials*

The only materials used in the experiment were the questionnaires which were issued to two of the three groups. Statistical analysis of the students, such as age, gender, and race are unavailable because I failed to include them in the questionnaire; therefore, I have no way of analyzing the differing experiences among groups of subjects. I cannot even accurately report the statistical data on gender divisions. In this way, the students' questionnaires were insufficient. However, the results still support the original hypothesis and offer a valid review of in-class tutoring.



### *Procedure*

Research for the study to justify the presence of an in-class tutoring program was conducted randomly. Questionnaires were provided to tutors in the Writing Center, and those who wished to participate in the study distributed the forms to their students during one of the last classes of the semester. Tutors informed the students that the study was completely voluntary, and they could temporarily leave the classroom if they did not wish to participate. Students were also told not to identify themselves in any way on the form and to be as honest as possible. Once the forms were completed, they were placed in an envelope, sealed, and brought to the Writing Center (See Attachment 2 for a sample questionnaire).

Questionnaires for the instructors were distributed by means of the Writing Center's director, Cindy Johanek. They were put in the departmental mailboxes of all faculty who participated in the in-class tutoring program. Again, those who wanted to respond did, and they, too, were told that the forms were voluntary. Instructors returned the forms to the director at the Writing Center (See Attachment 3 for sample of instructors' questionnaire).

Tutors were interviewed randomly at the Writing Center. All were aware of their right to refuse and not partake in the study. Most were questioned alone, so that other tutors' answers or opinions would not affect their responses (See Attachment 4 for an approximate list of questions asked).

## Results

### *Students*

Results of the students' questionnaires support the hypothesis that in-class tutoring is an effective means of improving students' writing. Most students (seventy-six percent) had been approached or helped by a tutor three to five times, and seventy-two percent felt that talking to a tutor helped either their grade on a paper or improved their overall grade in the class. Attachment 5 gives a detailed description of students' responses and their additional comments. Some of these comments, however, seem to challenge the hypothesis that in-class tutoring improves students' writing, but the majority of students felt that the tutors' presence positively affected their classroom experience.

### *Instructors*

Instructors' responses showed that fifty percent of the time, in-class tutors attended every class period, and half came at other irregular, but scheduled intervals. All instructors who returned the forms stated that the tutors' presence was helpful. Peer editing days were the most common times when instructors asked tutors to attend class, but tutors also participated in library orientation, computer lab workshops, and brainstorming sessions. In the space provided for comments, all instructors praised their tutors for establishing rapport and raising the level of students' learning(See Attachment 6).

### *Tutors*

Most tutors questioned were assigned to more than one section of in-class tutoring. Of the tutors surveyed, some attended every class period, and some went only occasionally, but there were a few who did both according to the individual instructor's preference. These tutors told me that they felt the more effective of the two methods was attending every class period because students seemed to trust them more, instructors involved them more, and they felt more comfortable in a familiar atmosphere. Some tutors felt apprehensive at the beginning of the semester because they either were unfamiliar with the instructor and his or her philosophy, or tutors were unsure of the dynamics in dealing with large groups. Overall, tutors said that the program was a positive addition to the Writing Center and to the classes in which they participated.

### Discussion

Based on the overwhelming support for the in-class tutoring program by all parties involved, the hypothesis that it is an effective means of allowing students to be independent and competent writers can be accepted.

### *Benefits of the Program*

The presence of an in-class tutoring program benefits all parties involved in the following ways.

- 1) Tutors in the classroom can increase the probability that students will receive help with their writing. In some

classrooms, the ratio between students and instructors can be as much as twenty-five to one, and many students may not receive the help or advice they need. In classes with tutors, both the instructor and the tutor circulate, and the probability increases that students' questions will be answered. Even if the students do not ask questions, they nevertheless have one more reader to give feedback who is also a peer and a fellow writer.

2) Another advantage to having an in-class tutor is that the tutor may bring a variety of teaching and learning styles to the classroom. Tutors who have worked in the Writing Center deal with many different students who all have different approaches to learning and writing. What works for one may not work for another, and with this experience, tutors can suggest options to students who have difficulty with writing in the classroom.

One student, for example, had trouble choosing a topic for a research paper. Telling me that he usually wrote about things that interested him, and none of the instructor's recommended topics piqued his interest, we began to talk about what he liked. As he talked, I began to make connections between his interests and the topics. Ultimately, he felt satisfied that he could indeed enjoy what he was to write about. The instructor did not have the class time for such a consultation, but the tutor did, and the alternate method of pre-writing worked.

3) Sometimes in situations where one person has authority over another, communication can break down.

Intimidation, shyness, or even fear can cause it, but having a tutor in class can eliminate potential problems. Tutors are in classes to help students primarily, and if for any reason, a student does not wish to consult with an instructor during class time, the tutor can usually answer the question. Tutors have no authority over the students; this factor allows students to express themselves more freely than they normally might with an instructor. Students can even ask advice from tutors if they have a conflict with the instructor, but again, tutors usually try not to act as the mediator.

4) Tutors benefit from the program as well in that they learn more about tutoring in general and learning and writing in particular. Close contact with instructors and varied contact with students can make tutors more learned in their field. Tutors must learn to be flexible while tutoring in the classroom or in the Writing Center. They must deal with different situations, such as working with international students who are learning English as a second language. Tutors must find different ways to effectively communicate with different students. Instructors also help tutors become better at their jobs in that they can give guidance when tutors are frustrated or faced with an unfamiliar situation. In-class tutoring allows tutors to learn from the students they help while also learning from the instructors who supervise them.

5) The fifth and final benefit of the in-class tutoring program is that the Writing Center is more visible to students

and the academic community in general. Students who may not have known about the Writing Center meet a tutor who works in the Center, and it becomes a known place where they feel they can receive help. Students who have in-class tutors also seem more inclined to go to the Writing Center because they know someone there. The idea of going to the Center seems less intimidating.

Many students, in fact, do go to the Center for follow-up consultations with their in-class tutors. Although the means of tracking specific numbers of students coming from in-class sections is insufficient, the number of appointments increased following the first semester of in-class tutoring from approximately five hundred to eight hundred. I know from experience that many students in my in-class sections have gone to the Writing Center to seek my help there. It is safe to assume that other students from in-class sections have sought their tutors' help in the Center. Tutors in the Writing Center have seen students make appointments because of previous experiences with in-class tutors, even though they were not in in-class sections at the time. This proves that some students will remember the Writing Center, even if they forget who their tutor was. Both the Writing Center and the students benefit from in-class tutoring.

#### *Drawbacks*

Surprisingly, very few drawbacks exist in the in-class tutoring program; however, the two main issues both affect classroom dynamics and the effectiveness of tutoring in the

classroom. The first problem was that some students did not trust tutors enough to consult them in the classroom. Students recognized the "peer" in peer tutor, and they sometimes felt that if tutors were indeed peers, then how could they know more about writing? Some students felt reluctant to talk to tutors, thinking that they would not help them in any way. Students with this attitude were more often in classes in which tutors only attended at irregular intervals, and tutors were not as familiar to students as they would have been if the tutors had attended every class period. Building trust between tutors and students was one of the main problems.

The other main problem was in defining tutors' roles. Some instructors wanted tutors to substitute if they were to be absent, and tutors were clearly told not to. Other instructors did not take advantage of the tutors' roles in the classrooms. In some of the in-class sections, some days the tutors would sit in the classrooms having no input whatsoever. In this situation, whether the tutor was there or not made no difference. Instructors need to integrate the tutors more into classroom activities because if students see that the instructor includes the tutor, the students may begin to trust the tutors more.

### Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made to improve the in-class tutoring program for future semesters, such as the following list.

1) Tutors and instructors should make each other aware of expectations for the semester. Since tutors are mostly under the direction of the instructor, the instructor should talk to the tutor about his or her duties. In an ideal situation, the instructor would permit feedback and suggestions from the tutor; however, both parties need to communicate more at the beginning of the semester, so that neither will be confused as the term progresses.

2) In addition to making each other aware of expectations, instructors and tutors should communicate outside of the classroom. This would keep tutors aware of assignments or other events planned for class, and this could be a time for tutors to consult with instructors if any problems arise. If tutors and instructors are familiar with one another, then the potential is higher for classroom success.

3) Tutors would probably find more success in the classrooms, too, if they attended every class period. During the first two semesters of the program, I attended some sections every day and others only periodically. Students seemed to trust me more when they saw me more often. They learned more about me, they felt more comfortable around me, and thus, they asked me more questions. I was no longer an outsider. It is true that some instructors do not need tutors every class period; some upper level classes that use in-class tutors do not need them every day because the students do not need as much assistance.



But in most classes, tutors seem to be more effective when they attend every class period rather than going periodically.

4) One administrative recommendation is to implement a system of record keeping. The Writing Center needs to establish a method of tracking students from in-class tutoring sections who seek help. This will support the presence of the in-class program, and it will show that tutors are making themselves available to students both in class and in the Center. One way to keep track of these students would be to include a question on the standard information sheet that all students fill out when they go to the Writing Center, such as "Are you a student with an in-class tutor, and if so, what is the tutor's name?".

Administrators will then see the numbers that prove that in-class tutoring brings students to the Writing Center.

### Conclusion

As a tutor who has been associated with the program intimately for the two semesters of its existence, I feel that in-class tutoring benefits all parties involved. Students say that tutors can help them when instructors cannot, and instructors say that tutors are a valuable addition to their classrooms. In-class tutoring promotes competent and independent writing in students who participate. The presence of the program can lead to students expressing themselves clearly and thoughtfully. The ramifications of such a program are twofold:

- 1) Ball State University students are more aware of the

services available at the Writing Center and more frequently make use of those services both in and out of the classroom.

2) Such a program as ours can then ultimately serve as a model for Writing Center programs at other universities. This study is one important step in establishing and assessing in-class tutoring programs. It assures that the program is beneficial overall, but also points to those areas where improvement will aid those involved, the tutors, the instructors, and most importantly, the students.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the tutors, students, and instructors who helped me complete this study. I must especially thank Lori Krasienko, Cindy Johanek, and my advisor, Dr. Kim Jones, for pointing me in the right direction when my thoughts began to stray from the topic at hand.

## **Proposal: Writing Center 1992 -93**

**Purpose:** To expand the capabilities of the Writing Center and change the nature of the Writing Center services to a more active in-class approach. Another purpose is to increase the attendance and usage of the Writing Center by not only students, but also faculty.

### **New Services:**

**In-class tutoring** - Tutors will be made available for in-class work with students during peer review or in-class writing. Orientation between instructors and tutors will take place between the 2-week period from the beginning of the semester until the opening of the Writing Center. Registration forms are available from Karen Taylor in the Writing Program Office in RB 2115. These forms require information from instructors concerning class meeting time, class section, time spent on a weekly basis working on in-class writing or peer editing sessions, time instructor is available during the first two weeks of classes for an orientation session with the In-class tutors. A Writing Center policy will state that tutors may not serve as substitutes or grade papers. It is our intention that this policy will be strictly enforced.

**Group study** - In-class tutors will direct study group sessions of up to 5 class members. Study groups will cover particularly common writing problems or supplemental instruction provided at the discretion of the instructor. These sessions will meet once a week in the Writing Center with the in-class tutor and another tutor.

**Tutor training** - The Writing Center will be closed bimonthly for 2-hour in-house training sessions. Tutors will prepare information from Writing Center subscriptions for presentation to their peers. These sessions will also involve an informal session dealing with day-to-day problems and concerns which the tutors have concerning their tutoring activities.

### **Expanded Options:**

**English 301** - Tutors will have the option of registering for English 301 - peer tutoring. This will give tutors greater opportunities and benefits from their tutoring experiences.

**Internship credit** - Tutors will also have the option to work on a special project, along with tutoring duties, in order to obtain English Communications Internship credit.

### **Old Services:**

The previous services will still be offered. Those services include walk-in help, individual tutoring sessions, and the Grammar Crisis Line.

Staff will be maintained at current level. Additional staff will be hired as needed.

## IN-CLASS TUTOR EVALUATIONS

1. Did a tutor ever help you during your class throughout the semester?  
       Yes                                No

2. If a tutor did help you, how many times?

IF NOT, PLEASE GO TO NUMBER 8

3. Did you find the tutor to be helpful? (1 very helpful--5 not helpful)  
   1        2        3        4        5

4. When talking to a tutor, you felt:

- A. More comfortable than talking to a teacher
- B. Less comfortable than talking to a teacher
- C. Like you would get a helpful answer
- D. Like the tutor did not help you

5. Do you think that talking to the tutor helped your grade either on the paper  
     or in the class?    Yes                                No

6. Do you think that the tutor gave you any information that would apply to  
     other classes in the future?    Yes                                No

7. Please rate the effectiveness of the in-class tutoring program.  
   1        2        3        4        5

8. What grade do you expect from this class?

IF THE TUTOR DID NOT HELP YOU, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING:

1. Why didn't the tutor help you?

- A. I didn't need it.
- B. He or she did not approach me.
- C. I would rather ask the teacher.
- D. I didn't think the tutor could answer my questions.
- E. Other(please tell us why)

2. How do you think you would feel about talking to a tutor rather than an  
     instructor?

- A. Less comfortable
- B. More comfortable
- C. The same

3. Do you know about the Writing Center?                Yes                                No

4. What grade do you expect from this class?

THANK YOU FOR EVALUATING OUR PROGRAM

IF YOU HAVE COMMENTS, PLEASE USE THE BACK OF THIS PAGE

Writing Center In-Class Tutor Evaluation

1) How often is a tutor scheduled to be in your classroom?

Daily          Other

2) If a tutor is in your classroom(s) every class period, please indicate whether or not you think tutors' regular attendance has been helpful and explain.

3) Please mark the activities you ask the tutor to participate in:

Peer review/editing          Computer lab work          In class writing

Library work/tours          Discuss reading/issues

Brainstorming          Other(explain)

4) Please rate the following on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the best.

A. Successfully establishes rapport with students

B. Answered students' questions accurately

C. The program has created more learning opportunities for students in my class.

5) Please indicate any additional information you feel is important to the growth of our in-class program. Also indicate if you would be interested in participating again next semester.

Questioning Tutors about In-Class Tutoring

- 1) How many sections of in-class tutoring did you attend this semester?

1                      2                      3

- 2) Do you attend every class period or periodically throughout the semester?

every class period                      periodically                      both

- 3) If you answered "both" to question 2, which method do you feel is more effective and why?

every class period                      periodically

- 4) Did you encounter any problems, and if so, what were they?

- 5) What is your overall opinion of the in-class tutoring program?

Additional comments needed and welcomed

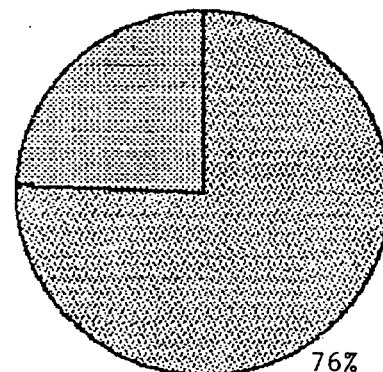
# In-class Tutor Survey Results

The results of this survey, taken Fall Semester 1992, are based on the responses of 226 students from a sample of 539 students (42%) who participated in the in-class tutoring program for the first semester.

## 1. Did a tutor ever help you during class throughout the semester?

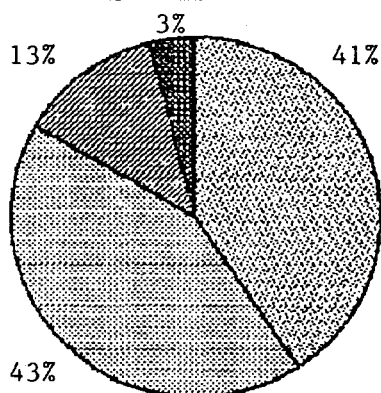
76% respondents were helped at least once  
24% had not been helped by in-class tutors

24%



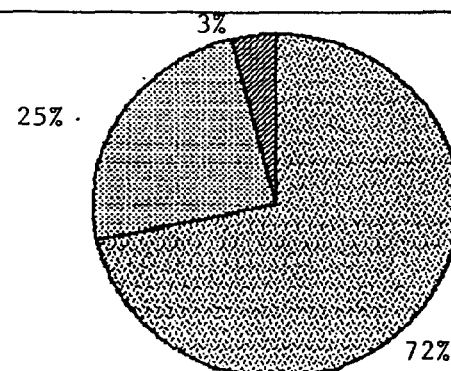
## 2. If a tutor did help you, how many times?

41% were helped 1 - 2 times  
43% were helped a few times (3 - 5)  
13% were helped often (6 - 10)  
3% were helped every class period



## 3. Do you think that talking to the tutor helped your grade either on the paper or in the class?

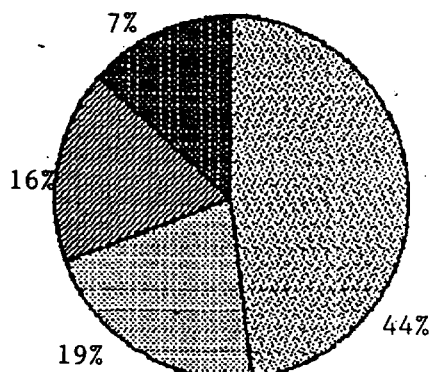
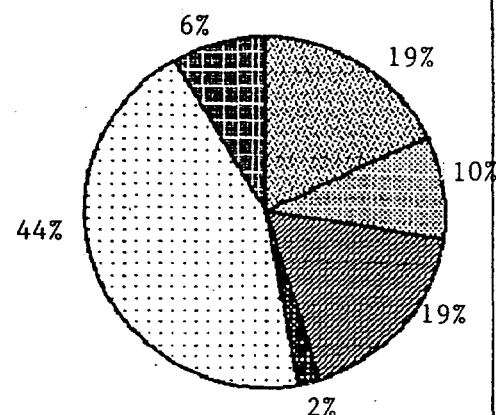
72% said yes  
25% said no  
3% said they weren't sure





#### 4. If you were helped by a tutor, you felt:

- a. More comfortable than talking to the instructor - 19%
- b. Less comfortable than talking to the instructor - 10%
- c. Felt as comfortable as talking to the instructor - 19%
- d. Like the tutor did not help you - 2%
- e. Like the tutor would give you a helpful answer - 44%
- f. No response - 6%



#### 5. If the tutor did not help you, why not?

- a. I didn't need it - 44%
- b. The tutor didn't approach me - 19%
- c. I would rather ask the teacher - 16%
- d. I never approached the tutor - 7%

## Additional Comments

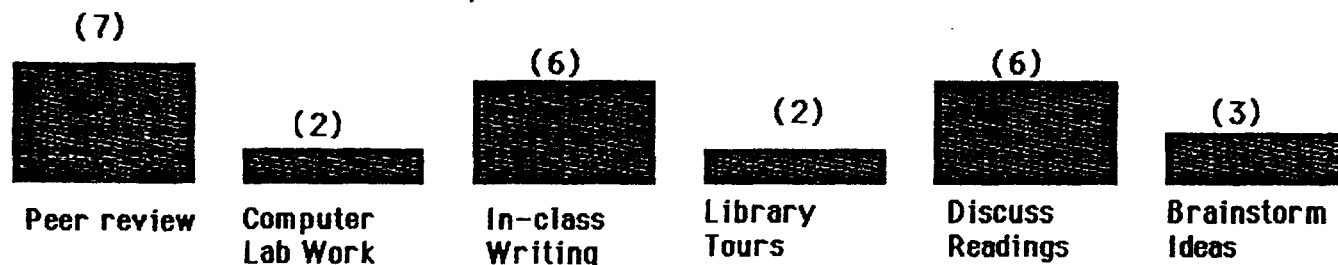
- \*I wasn't aware of the tutor's presence in the classroom.
- \*I found the tutoring to be a great help because many times I found the teacher to be hard to understand.
- \*The professor should have made us more aware of the tutor's presence and allowed her to take a more active part in the class.
- \*The in-class tutors were a valuable part of my classroom experience.
- \*I found the tutors to be vague, and they rarely helped.
- \*The outside conferences with the tutor were a good idea.
- \*I was more aware of the Writing Center because of the in-class tutor.
- \*I was glad the tutor was available when the instructor wasn't.
- \*I feel the tutors should be more forward in approaching the students.
- \*I didn't feel like you judged my paper like the instructor would.
- \*I feel more comfortable asking the tutor than asking the teacher.

# Faculty Response to In-Class Tutoring

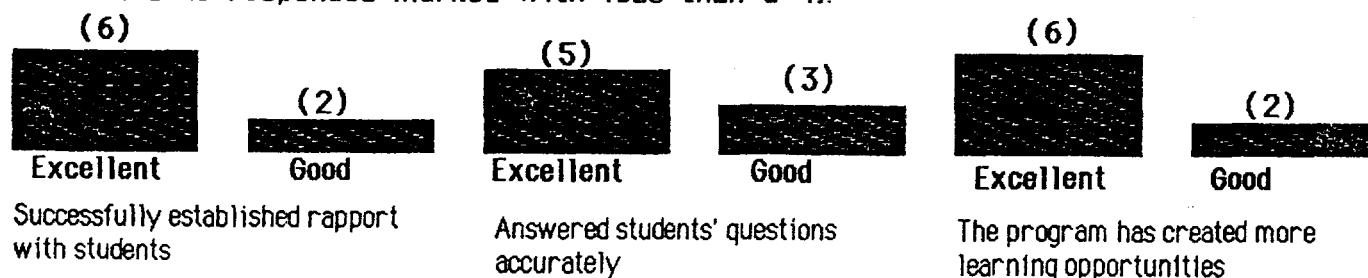
Of the 23 sections of English in the in-class tutoring program, eleven instructors were involved (many with more than one section). Of those eleven instructors, eight responded to the midterm survey. Many of these instructors preferred to have their tutors in the classroom every class period.

1. If a tutor is in your classroom(s) every class period, please indicate whether or not you think tutors' regular attendance has been helpful and explain.
  - a. The tutor knows what is important in student writing for this class.
  - b. Because her presence is routine, I think her workshops and presentations are more effective.
  - c. My tutor's presence has been helpful since he can establish rapport on a different level than I can. He knows the students, he knows the work I give them, and he can regularly tutor students with surface errors and grammar problems.
  - d. I think regular attendance leads to a stronger relationship between tutors and students, but I don't know that I'd actually require such attendance for all tutors. I think that may best be left to the tutor and professor to work out.

2. Please mark the activities you ask the tutor to participate in:



3. Please rate the following with 5 excellent, 4 good, 3 average, 2 fair, 1 poor (there were no responses marked with less than a 4).



## Additional Comments

1. Having the in-class tutors has given my students added interest in going to the Writing Center.
2. This truly has been an excellent opportunity for the students--and especially so for me--to learn different ways of looking at writing.
3. It seems wise that in its present form, the program offers the teacher and tutor enough freedom to define their respective roles independently of the usual bureaucratic guidelines.
4. I truly appreciate the help I am provided by your tutor. I will eagerly participate next semester.